

News Release



Oregon Housing and Community Services

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Oregon Housing and Community Services shares update on efforts to speed up application processing for federal emergency rental assistance

State and local partners speed up application processing, while focusing on eviction prevention

OCT. 8, 2021 (SALEM, Ore.) — Today [Oregon Housing and Community Services](#) (OHCS) shared an update on efforts to speed up application processing for families who have applied for the [Oregon Emergency Rental Assistance Program](#) (OERAP). To date, OHCS and local program administrators (LPAs) have paid \$80.8 million in federal emergency rental assistance (ERA1) to 12,366 households. While the speed of application processing has increased, and the agency exceeded a U.S. Treasury 65% benchmark, OHCS and state and local partners remain concerned for renters.

“We’ve paid out \$50 million in federal funds since the end of August, and we’ve never provided this much rental assistance in such a short amount of time,” said Margaret Salazar, executive director of OHCS. “But that’s still not enough. We share the legitimate concerns of our partners and elected officials who are worried that renters who have applied may still be at risk of eviction. It’s taken much more time than anyone anticipated—or would have liked—to process the staggering number of applications. OHCS has taken numerous steps to address challenges, and we need all of our state and local leaders and partners to do the same.”

Oregon is currently ranked [eighth in the nation](#) in percent of federal funds distributed, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. The state was just one of a handful of states that likely met or exceeded the U.S. Treasury’s 65% benchmark, with 75% of funds paid or obligated. Pending U.S. Treasury validation, meeting the benchmark would make the state eligible for additional federal funding. As a result, OHCS sent a [letter](#) to the U.S. Treasury to officially request additional funds. Local





jurisdictions that received ERA1 funding directly, including Marion, Washington, Multnomah, Lane and Clackamas Counties, are also subject to the U.S. Treasury guidance.

Updated Numbers

[To date](#), OHCS and LPAs have:

- Paid \$80.8 million to landlords on behalf of 12,366 Oregon families, including \$21 million in the past two weeks alone. \$50 million of total funds were distributed since the end of August.
- Processed and obligated an additional \$52.9 million in funds for 19,198 households, meaning those applications are in the final steps of processing or have been submitted for funding.
- Received more than \$279 million in federal ERA1 funding requests via applications received.
- Received more than 38,500 completed applications.
 - About 26% of applications (13,615) have been started but not completed for submission.
- About 14,484 applications are still in the review process.

Actions Taken

OHCS laid out a three-point plan in September to work with LPAs to speed up application processing and the changes are working, as evidenced in the numbers above.

- 1. Adding capacity through PPL:** In August, OHCS hired vendor Public Partnerships LLC (PPL) to process 8,500 of the oldest applications in the Tri-County area. PPL has processed nearly all of those 8,500 applications. Last week, the state expanded PPL's contract, adding an additional 37 staff, who will begin processing applications for counties having the [biggest challenges](#) with applications outside the 60-/90- day window.
- 2. Leveraging all possible [federal flexibilities](#):** The state opted into all federal flexibilities that could ease the burden for renters needing to provide certain documentation. These flexibilities have not been consistently adopted across the 18 LPAs that are processing applications. OHCS sent a letter to LPAs this week notifying them that the agency is amending their contracts to include clear expectations for immediately adopting all federal flexibilities allowed. This step will significantly speed up application processing.
- 3. Holding OHCS and LPAs accountable:** To increase accountability, OHCS set clear processing targets for itself and LPAs. PPL is expected to process 500 per week, moving to 1,000 applications per week in the coming week; Metro area LPAs need to process 420-450 applications per week; and all other LPAs need to process 1,000 per week. Even if these targets are met, the state estimates it will take between 10 and 13 weeks to process the batch of older applications.

Challenges Remain





OHCS joined advocates and LPAs on Mon., Oct. 4 to [testify](#) before the Joint House Interim Committee on Housing to share progress—but also discuss the challenges that still remain. Approximately 11,900 applications are outside the respective 60-/90-day windows of protection. This [map](#) shows the number of applications outside the window by county. The window begins when a tenant shows their landlord proof they applied for OERAP or another rental assistance program, and this data cannot be tracked.

“The old way of doing things through a decentralized housing system in our country has not worked in the pandemic,” said Salazar. “We are ranked [eighth](#) in the nation for federal funding distributed, and we’re still coming up short. Collectively, Oregon leaders underestimated how complex the program would be. We’ve never had a centralized way to determine the need in our state—until now. LPAs are trying to navigate an imperfect software system that had to be stood up quickly. Some counties are not using all federal flexibilities to ease documentation burdens for renters. Many counties haven’t been able to staff up sufficiently.”

Outreach Efforts

OHCS remains committed to an equitable recovery. Black, Indigenous, people of color, immigrants and refugees do not have equal access and support. OHCS is investing in and learning from communities closest to these core systemic issues. The agency says this crisis demands extraordinary speed and the evolution of a new system of care focused on low-barrier and equitable eviction prevention strategies.

As part of the \$204 million ERA grant from the federal government, OHCS [is investing \\$18 million](#) in housing stabilization grants to ramp up outreach and connect renters with legal services.

The state is taking a three-pronged approach to outreach and legal support:

- **Application completion:** OHCS hired additional staff to reach out to renters whose applications are incomplete or are awaiting a tenant response.
- **Outreach and application assistance:** OHCS is working with the Oregon Health Authority (through 15 CBO sub-grants), the Oregon Human Development Corporation, the Fair Housing Council of Oregon, Transitions Projects, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (DVSA) Program Investment and other organizations to raise awareness and support renters in applying for the program. Outreach materials are available [in 11 languages](#). OHCS is convening stakeholders for input on increasing language access and improving the application process.
- **Legal services:** OHCS is providing grants to the Oregon Law Center’s Eviction Defense Project and Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) to support tenants facing eviction.

If a renter has fallen behind on rent, they should call 211 right away and apply for OERAP at oregonrentalassistance.org. The application is currently available in five languages. If a renter receives an eviction notice from their landlord, they should call the Oregon Law Center’s Eviction Defense Project line ([888-585-9638](tel:888-585-9638)) or email the Project (evictiondefense@oregonlawcenter.org) to seek legal help.





Visit the OERAP dashboard [here](#) for more data.

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